



## Developing communicative skills using technology

**Benzigar**

Dept. of English & Comparative Lit., M. K. University, Madurai-21

### **Abstract**

*The paper attempts to explore the use of technology to enhance communicative skills of the learner. In the typical Indian classroom, the teacher is constrained to teach a set of hundred students and more. The situation multiplies the responsibility of the teacher, turning the classroom all sound and fury and the teaching activity is a laborious process. The context makes a rare phenomenon individualized teaching where the need of every learner is taken care of. The student remains spiritless and unenthusiastic for he finds himself as an insignificant, unnoticed individual lost in a maddening crowd. It is at this critical juncture modern technological equipments, otherwise called new instructional media, came to the rescue of the teacher and learner and solved two major problems. It let the pace of learning be determined by the learner himself, and it made use of lessons prepared by the best teachers to thousands of learners.*

**Key words:** Computer, Internet, Web, Email

### **Introduction**

English has become global language and learning English language has become proportionately scientific. Integration of Modern technologies has redefined the existing

pedagogic system and quickened learning and teaching process effective and stimulating. The modern graduates are very much tuned to modern technologies as it narrows down the gap between the instructor and the learner. Information Technology in language teaching probably began with papyrus. It has attracted admirers and detractors ever since. Modern technology helps the students to evaluate their own learning process and allows the teacher to deliver instructions with desired effect. Pedagogy has entered a time of innovative, exciting and challenging ways of teaching and learning. The attitude to learning also changed with the shift from teaching to learning, and educational technology has been part of that process.

### **Computer**

Recent years have shown an explosion of interest in using computers for language teaching and learning. Multimedia computing and the Internet placed computers in language instruction an integral part. Current advances in computer technology and the rapid pace of change in the communication revolution affect the way English Language (EL) teachers use information technology (IT) to develop learners' language skill. Computers in the English Second language learning promote linguistic proficiency and Communicative competence in L2 Learners. Levy observes "Computer-assisted language leaning can reduce the anxiety of students and turns out to be a positive side of learning" (1997: 83). The computer's capabilities promise to improve both the quality and the extent of the learning experience. Interactive computer network allows students to test the result of learning without the risk of being punished for any mistake. CALL packages are designed to promote explicit or implied language learning objectives and are usually based on the author's beliefs about the ways in which students learn languages. They often support in the acquisition of knowledge about language and in the application of that knowledge in discrete and mixed skill activities.

CALL includes not only software specifically designed to promote language learning, but also applications of generic software such as word-processor support language learning, and the use of communication such as email and the World Wide Web to bring the target language into the classroom and to provide opportunities for the learner to communicate with native speakers. The value of word processors for writing is generally considered to be their capacity to ease the mechanical processes of generating text; revising text by deletions, additions, substitutions, and block moves; and producing clear and attractive finished copy. As compared

to a pen, a word processor offers both a suite of advanced writing tools and a facilitative environment for generating ideas and text, both as drafts and finished copy. There is also another category of software much used by linguistics, namely authoring packages designed specially to promote language learning. These packages tend to consist of enhanced, electronic versions of activities done on paper, which are based on perceptions of how the learners learn languages. As the content is determined by the teacher, the activities can be exploited to support a wide range of methodologies and to accommodate different learning and teaching modes.

Computers provide valuable language experience ELL students. According to Liaw, “teachers should offer English language learners a language rich environment in which students are constantly engaged in language activities. Children need to be able to interact with each other so that learning through communication occurs. Computers can facilitate this type of environment. The computer can act as a tool to increase verbal exchange” (1997: 57). And the “Verbal interaction and the use of a variety of language functions by English language learners can be facilitated by the use of the computer. ...the computer can be a useful supplement to the traditional curriculum of the ELL classroom by promoting verbal communication and the acquisition of English” (72-73).

Kang and Dennis write, “Any attempt to treat vocabulary learning as learning of isolated facts certainly will not promote real vocabulary knowledge” (1995 27). Students need to learn vocabulary in context and with visual clues to help them understand. Computers provide this rich, contextual environment. The computers allow learners to become active learners in a one-on-one environment. Computers can incorporate various learning strategies as well as accommodate a variety of learning styles. A situational context employing the English word first

and then giving the definition and picture can enrich the knowledge of vocabulary. The contextual approach proved to be much more effective in promoting long-term recall of vocabulary. This learning process is possible and more effective by the use of computers.

There are several ways in which technology can be used to improve reading ability. The Computers can increase the interest level of learners while keeping the text simple and easy to read and offers immediate feedback on performance. They can provide added practice when necessary. According to Case and Truscott, “students have been able to improve their sight word vocabulary, fluency and comprehension” (1999 367). Computer based reading instruction also allows for “increased interaction with texts, attention to individual needs, and increased independence through an ability to read texts they would not otherwise be able to read” (371). Computer software and language games provide many fun opportunities for students to practice literary skills.

Lewis recommends that composition for beginning learners should be a guided activity so that students do not become frustrated. Writing paragraphs in a language that is still somewhat unfamiliar to students can be difficult. When using a computer, the use of graphics can make this much more enjoyable. Using clip art can also help students to convey their thoughts more clearly. Grammar skill can also be demonstrated and reinforced using computers. The teacher can direct students to highlight a specific part of speech (e.g. verb) throughout their writing. To highlight, students have a lot of choices, such as underlining, italicizing or changing the font size, color or type. Using a computer as a medium for studying grammar is much more motivating for a student as opposed to writing with a pencil. Computer presentation tool like PowerPoint is widely used in the modern language classroom to promote language teaching effectively. PowerPoint can be used effectively to present a variety of aspects

of a new language, e.g. dialogues, grammar, vocabulary and as audio and video clips. This presentation works well with a laptop connected to a projector or with fixed interactive white board.

Computer assisted instruction has been shown in a range of studies to facilitate learning in a variety of ways. Computers can be used to aid in teaching EL Learners in core academic subjects, such as reading and writing. Computers aid in vocabulary development and verbal language development as well. It is important to recognize that computers are not a substitute for effective teaching. Computers are a tool; they are simply one type of supplement to the regular curriculum in teaching EL Learners as they develop their English Language skills.

### **Internet**

Computers have historically contributed to ELT with both pedagogical applications and by helping one to understand the nature of the language; however it is suggested that the Internet, and the resulting Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), has now gone way beyond this to change the language itself. It is fair to assert that the growth of the Internet has facilitated the growth of the English language and that this has occurred at a time when computers are no longer the exclusive domain of the dedicated few, but rather widely available to many. The Internet may be a contributory factor in shifting away from communicative towards a context-based approach to language teaching pedagogy.

In the pre-Internet days computers in ELT could be viewed from one of two perspectives. Firstly, CALL developed and concerned itself with the pedagogical applications of the technology. Second perspective was computers used for assisting and understanding of what constitutes the English language and how it works. The arrival of the Internet brought

significant change to language. The Internet is changing the language partly because it gives rise to new vocabulary. The following verbs are just one illustration of the influences on vocabulary. They all either meant different things, or did not exist, a few years ago; to...email, text, boot, chat, surf, bookmarks, e-shot, google etc., More fundamentally the Internet is changing language. A 'Netspeak' and a 'Netquette' are emerging; the former refers to a language variant, the latter to the conventions which surround its use.

The Internet is a multi-faceted and enabling technology provides a huge database. Individuals and institutions have used it extensively to store, organize and present an endless range of information on language learning and language teaching. The quality varies widely, and the cost ranges from free to commercially prohibitive. Now information access is often less a supply problem than a user problem of available time, skills, initiative and intelligence. Almost all educational institutions now have some kind of Internet presence. For a diminishing few it is merely an electronic advertisement. Others would not exist without it, and offer the full range of Internet learning technologies and resources.

### **Web**

The Web can be used in a myriad of ways of for language teaching. The World Wide Web is only part of Internet. Part library, part publishing house, part telephone, part interactive television, the Web represents one of the most diverse and revolutionary media in human history. It is already starting to transform academia and have a profound impact on education as well. One should accept the fact that Internet and the WWW are not synonymous terms. "This is the most powerful and fastest growing Internet Service, now known simply as the Web. The web is accessed by means of a computer program known as a browser" (Davies, 1999: 12).

Web provides linguistic exercises, accessing to authentic reading materials, stimulate communicative exercises.

Development of various web resources has created avenues for many new methods for testing students' knowledge in any field. It is particularly conducive in the field of language pedagogy as the process of testing plays a significant role in both comprehension and production. Some of the testing methods that one can readily incorporate in Web pages are Cloze tests, Multiple Choice tests, Question answers, requiring both open-ended and closed type answers, and Matching techniques etc. The Web is clearly a candidate for the delivery of pre-written and recorded content; many courses in a wide range of disciplines already make use of the Web to present course materials to students as Web pages.

#### **E-mail**

E-mail is a related but different technology to Internet. E-mail's use as a language learning medium has been slower to develop, although a large amount of unstructured communication takes place among pen friends. Since e-mail is both asynchronous and simple, it does offer certain teaching advantages. Communication is at the heart of language teaching and learning. Contact with speakers of the target languages has always been encouraged, but has not always been easy to achieve, particularly in recent years when letter writing has not been a favourite activity of young people. This problem is solved by using email since it is a less formal medium than paper-based letters.

Email technology can be used to develop writing skills. It allows the learner to read the incoming messages and the learner can also use his dictionary as well as pencil and paper before responding. This motivates him to write before typing. A well motivated learner also

uses many phrases in his email that he had learnt previously. Trenches discovered that “using electronic mail as a supplement to the classroom curriculum can be effective. The students voluntarily used the email. They were self-motivated to use their new language in a new and creative way for them” (1996: 472). Electronic mail’s scrolling features allows the learner to view the incoming message and its structure as a model for creating a response further allows students to easily edit and revise. The major benefits of using email as a language learning activity is the fact that students are using meaningful languages and authentic text.

### **Summation**

The ESL classrooms in the Indian context have their own limitations. Such as, Poor infrastructure, Non availability of Modern equipments, Non-availability of materials and Non-cooperation from the authority

Language learning activity has become all fun and no problem. However the doubt whether machines can substitute the human teacher often creeps in. Down the centuries, a number of essays have been written about the conflict between man and machine. Many prominent men of letters have asserted, of course with regret, the victory of machines over men. But such a pessimistic view is certainly unaccepted at least in the field of ELT. It is the work of the best human instructor that has been fed into the machine. The situation only clarifies that in spite of technology and its progress, no machine can defy man.

One should be aware of the fact that no ‘miracle method’ can be found to solve the various and complex problems related to language acquisition. One of the very important factors in succeeding is a good co-operative relationship between teachers and learners. Among others factor are: repetition as the ‘Mother of Wisdom’; learning by doing; experiencing and discovering; learning by enjoying; learning through complex knowledge approach; learning by building up specific abilities and skills on the top of the general ones; learning through



skill transfer; practising all four language skills at the same time; and the key role of a teacher in the learning process.

Indeed, technology has turned the language teaching/ learning process an interesting drama in which the teacher is no longer a monster with a deadly weapon but a fellow actor and stage director. One should also take into consideration while meriting the effect of the learning that input cannot be equated with output and that teaching cannot be equated with learning. A careful application of modern technology in language teaching process can bring a rapid change in the accumulation of language acquisition in learners, thus the basic aim of language teaching and learning can be achieved with desired effect.

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